A SHORT DISCOURSE

Concerning the

Churches Authority

IN

MATTERS of FAITH.

Shewing that the

PRETENSES

OF THE

Church of Rome

ARE

WEAK and *PRECARIOUS*

In the Resolution of it.

LICENSED, March 8. 1686.

LONDON,

Printed for *Randal Taylor* near *Stationers-hall.* 1687.

THE PREFACE.

FInding, that in our Modern Controversies with the Church of Rome *which are Printed, and in Discourses with those of that Communion, they make their Retreat almost upon all Accounts to the Churches Authority; either as a Point that may be most Colourably defended, or which lazy and weak Heads most readily take up with, I was induced to examin it.*

Safety and Certainty are things very valuable, not only because they carry a delightfull correspondency to our Minds, but also for the respect they have to the Time before us, which in Prudence we must provide for; no Condition being so uneasy and disgracefull, as when a Man comes to proclaim his own Folly by saying, Who thought of this?

Such as our Interest at stake is, such ought our Care to be, that we may not be imposed upon by Pretences. It argues a degenerous Mind, that rests it self upon that which comes next hand. But not to inlarge this Preface, I will only say a very few Things concerning Faith, for which Church-Authority is pretended as a Ground.

Faith is often in Scripture put to signify Religion; and in that Sense it implies, not only those Things which a Christian must know and believe, but also the applying the Mind to them in all Obedience and Humility, not excluding the assistance of Grace which subdues the perversness of our Wills; and thus, with a particular Propriety, it may be styled the Gift of God. But in this following Discourse, as sometimes in Scripture, Faith more especially means, that Act or Operation of the Mind whereby it imbraces those Things which are sufficiently Proposed to it. And as Truth is more or less apparent, so the Mind is more or less firmly united to it. Not that the Object of our Faith has in it any Uncertainty, but

that our Prejudices and Passions, our Interests and Pleasures, by which our Wills are warped and made stubborn, hinder the Mind from apprehending Truth. These false Biasses too often confound our Reasonings, and misguide our Minds: And hence it comes to pass, as the Scripture observes, that Faith in some is Weak, in all capable of Increase.

'Tis manifest, the Mind may discern Truth so, as to be certain of it; but still a Corrupt Will may as it were unhinge the Judgment, and make its adherence less firm. This was well enough observed by him that lately wrote the History of the Life of Christ, That Faith which springs from the Evidence of Sense, or from clear Demonstration, must needs be of small Esteem and Reward with God. St. Thomas *was Checked for not believing without it; and the Parable tells us, if* Moses *and the Prophets could not Convince, neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the Dead. Now if the Churches Authority be that which our Faith may resolve into; the Assent of the Mind would in all Points be equally Firm and Clear; and so Faith would be Equal in all, annd capable of Improvement in none.*

Sect. 40. pag. 38. Printed at Oxford.

Plain it is, that the design of Religion is to bring Men to a right apprehension and belief of God; and to ingage them to a holy and vertuous Life, in conformity to such an Idea of that pure and perfect Being. He that has not a Mind so disposed, will never be influenced by an Infallible Guide; and he that has an humble Mind, and teachable Spirit will need none. However, I am sure, he that will not be satisfied without one, must go farther than Rome *to find him. But this grows too fast for a Preface; therefore I will only tell you, that I have purposely avoided a multitude of Citations, because they have more or less Authority as People please; but I have proceeded by the weights and moments of Reason, which are equally valuable to all.*

A SHORT

A SHORT DISCOURSE Concerning the Churches Authority IN MATTERS of FAITH.

IT is a fundamental Maxim, and of unqueſtionable Authority in Nature, That Truth is always and every where one and the ſame. So that among the various Opinions in the World, but one of them can be right. Upon which account, Schiſm, with its ill Conſequences, is on all ſides much lamented, whileſt every body thinks he has the Truth, and Peace, and Unity, in pretence at leaſt, much deſired. But the miſery is, all would have them upon their own terms, and that fruſtrates their deſires.

Controverſies therefore ſtill depending, and the Points under debate being of ſuch importance, that

the Party which affirms them, makes the believing them to be a neceſſary Condition of Catholick-Communion, and damns them that refuſe them; while the Party that denies ſays, they run a manifeſt hazard that imbrace them: It cannot be thought unfit for any Man to inquire after a method, which may bring theſe Diſputes to an iſſue, or that may keep in Peace and Quietneſs the Minds and Conſciences of Chriſtians, while Pride, Intereſt, or Prejudice, ſhall keep open the Breach, or maintain the Quarrel.

Nothing is more Natural and Congenial to Mankind than Truth; and the deſire of it is implanted in the hearts of all Men; an impartial ſearch after it therefore, is what all Men are bound to. And as Salvation is the End in Common aimed at by all, ſo it highly concerns every Chriſtian to examin the way by which he goes toward that End; and he ought to inquire the more Cautiouſly and Diligently, for that the ways propoſed for attaining Salvation are Many and Different: And thoſe that go one Way, will hardly allow Safety to them that take another. And this at preſent is the Caſe between the Papiſts and the Proteſtants, which invite Men to each others Communion, as ſafer and better for attaining Eternal Happineſs.

Every Man has a Soul to be ſaved; and what muſt be done to inherit Eternal Life, is an Enquiry every one in the World ought, and, I hope, moſt Chriſtians do, make for themſelves.

For ſince our firſt Parents, by their Diſobedience, incurred Death to themſelves, and their Poſterity, Salvation is what by Nature we could neither Claim nor Expect. But, that the Devil might not triumph in an abſolute Conqueſt over ſo glorious a part of the Creation as Mankind, God, of his infinite Mercy, was pleaſed to enter into a Second Covenant with Men, in order

order to their Salvation; but this upon Condition of Faith and Repentance on our parts, to anſwer the Salvation propoſed and offered on his.

Now this Covenant, being an Act of meer Grace, iſſuing purely from the good Pleaſure of God; it is very plain, Mankind can know no more of this Covenant, nor of the Conditions of it, than God himſelf has been pleaſed to Reveal and Diſcover. So that all Queſtions and Diſputes, about our Common Salvation, muſt be brought to this one as the Standard of all, *viz.* Whether it be the Will of God, or rather, Whether God has Diſcovered it to be his Will. For though the Will of God be the Fountain of all Duty and Obligation, yet it cannot be a binding Law to any body, till it be made known to him, or ſufficient means given for him to know it.

That God can make his Will known to any Man, is too certain to be doubted; but that his Will ſhould be known, before he has diſcovered it, can never be pretended. And becauſe every Man, conſidered as a Creature, and more eſpecially every Chriſtian, is bound to obey the Will of God; therefore every Man is bound to inform himſelf of ſo much as God has made neceſſary to be known for his Salvation. I have added this, to ſhew that Implicit Faith is a dangerous bottom for any body to reſt upon: For to believe as another believes, unleſs a Man knows what it is he believes, and upon what account, is very abſurd, as may be made out anon.

So much of the Will of God, as may be diſcovered by the Light of Nature, is beſides my preſent Buſineſs; becauſe there is little difference among us about it. But that part of the Will of God, which we are bound to know, and adhere to, as we are Chriſtians, by Profeſſion diſtinguiſhed from the reſt of Mankind, as being

in Covenant with God, is the Subject of this ensuing Discourse.

Now this part of the Will of God, is either revealed to the Mind of every individual Christian, by particular and immediate Inspiration from God, or it was made known to some particular select Persons, who were to instruct the rest. The first of these ways is not pretended, or allowed, either by Protestants or Papists; but the second is, *viz.* That God did Discover his Will to some that they might Publish it to the rest. And thus far I take it to be agreed betwixt us.

Before we advance another step, we will lay it down
1 Cor. 2. 11. as a Ground, That no Man knows the Mind of a Man, save the Spirit of a Man that is in him: No Man can know the Mind of another farther than it is Discovered to him. And by Consequence, no Man can know Revelations from God, made to the Mind and Understanding of another, but by one of these two ways; in the first place, either God, by Inspiration, must assure him that he has made such Revelations to the other: As when God sent St. *Paul* at his Conversion to *Damascus* to be instructed by *Ananias*, which was an extraordinary Case, not fit to be drawn into Precedent; and so neither pretended to, nor to be expected, since stances of it hitherto are so rare. Or, in the second place, he, to whom the Revelation is made, must bring such Testimony and Evidence, as may Convince Men that it is really Divine. His bare word for it, will not be a Competent Proof: Nor will the Testimony of other Men satisfie the Minds of reasonable Enquirers in this Case; for those others must have some to Witness for them too, and so on without End. Which plainly evinces, that this is not a Basis for Faith to rest upon. Let us see then what will do, for we cannot forget what our Saviour confesses of himself

to

to the Jews, *viz.* (*a*) That if he bear Witness of himself, his Witness is not true; that is, it is not of force to Convince. But then he tells the Jews, (*b*) They ought to Believe him for his Works sake; and accordingly he appealed to his Hearers. That the Works which he did in his Fathers Name bore Witness of him. * The Miracles which he wrought among them were sufficient to prove his Authority to be Divine, and his Doctrin to be from God. *Nicodemus* freely confessed as much, when he owned him a Teacher come from God; because no Man could do the Miracles which he did, except God were with him. And as our Saviour did demonstrate his Divinity by his Works; so, when he sent his Apostles to publish his Doctrin to the World, he sealed their Commission, by giving them a Power to work Miracles, which might convince their Hearers of its Truth. *And they* (the Apostles) *went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word with Signs following.* So that it is not to be doubted, but that the Doctrine which the Apostles preached was Divine; and the Miracles which they wrought, are our assurance that it was so. And hitherto all Christians proceed with little or no difference.

(*a*) Joh. 5. 31.

(*b*) Joh. 14. 11.

* *Post monstra tot perdomita, post Phlegram impio Sparsam cruore, postque defensos Deos, nondum liquet de Patre?* Sen. *Her. Fur. Act.* 2. *Sc.* 3.

Mark 16. 20.

Having thus laid down Miracles as a foundation upon which we are in some manner to ensure our Faith; it seems necessary before we proceed, in few words to set down, 1. What we mean by Miracles; and, 2. How far this Testimony of Miracles may extend, so as to authorise our Belief.

First, by Miracles we must understand such Works as are not only without the Lines of ordinary Course, and measure of Nature; for of this kind many things happen, which may be called Wonders, but not Miracles; but such as are above the power of Nature to effect.

But

But becauſe many ſuch Works have in appearance been wrought, for very different Purpoſes; we muſt, in the ſecond place, look what Judgment muſt be made of all ſuch things. And certainly ſome way there is to diſtinguiſh; or elſe, the Minds of Men would be involved in moſt perplexing and inextricable Difficulties, by ſuch Contradictions, as have been abetted with Signs and Wonders. Let us ſee then by what Rules we muſt examine and judge Miracles themſelves, or ſuch Doctrines as are advanced upon them. For to receive all without diſtinction, would come to the ſame thing as to allow none: Becauſe that can never prove any one Point, which may be alledged, or colourably pretended, in favour of another; unleſs there be ſome way to appropriate it to one ſide, as by the Rules following it may.

Whatſoever Doctrin is propoſed, that is contrary to right Reaſon, or the fundamental Laws of Nature, cannot be Divine, or ſuch as we ought to believe, though never ſo many Signs ſhould be ſhew'd to confirm it. For right Reaſon is only a Judgment made according to that Law and Standard of Juſtice and Truth, which God our Creator has ſtamped upon the Minds of Men. And the Fundamentals of Reaſon iſſuing from God, as Light flows from its Fountain the Sun, muſt always remain unchangeably the ſame; becauſe he himſelf, from whom they Spring, has no variation. And if the Principles of Reaſon were not ſo fixed, we ſhould be expoſed to all manner of illuſion; and ſhould never be able to believe any thing, becauſe we could be certain of nothing.

Deut. 13. 1, 2. Upon this ground God directs the Jews to try their Prophets; who if they preached up other Gods, were not to be hearkned to, though they worked Miracles; nothing being more abſurd, or inconſiſtent with right Reaſon,

Reason, than allowing many Gods. Yet further, God, when he created Man, according to the exact Laws of eternal Justice, implanted in our Natures the Seeds of it, and the Sense of Honesty; insomuch that whatever Miracles tend to the Damage of Mankind, or the Corruption of Manners, they cannot be from God; nor can they authorize any Doctrin as Divine, that is inconsistent with the forementioned Standard of Justice and Reason. And this makes a real Distinction, and sensible Difference betwixt the Miracles wrought by Christ, or his Apostles, and those by Heathen Magicians. On the one hand, the Miracles always tended to good, and were such as might invite Love as well as Admiration. On the other hand, they were, for the most part, hurtful to Mens Persons and Estates; unless it was sometimes that the Devils cured the Diseases they had caused, but it was still to establish a greater Tyranny. When the Jews taxed our Saviour with casting out Devils by Beelzebub, the Prince of the Devils; he answers to this effect, That the Devil was too Wise a Creature to destroy his own Kingdom, by casting out Devils; especially, when sometimes they were made to own themselves to be Devils, and to confess Christ to be the Son of God: *But*, says he, *if I cast out Devils by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God is come unto you.* And this was frequent, in the Primitive Church, that the Christians, by a Divine Power, overruled all the Powers of Darkness, imployed by the Magicians of those times. For as to do Works above Nature, speaks a Power above her; so, when those Works tend to the good of Men, by promoting Vertue, and establishing true Piety, they must reasonably be concluded to be from a Divine Author. Let this then be the first Step, or the Ground of all; That whatsoever Doctrin, or pretended Revelation,

Origen. cont. Cels. lib. 2. pag. 91. Ed. Cant.

Matt. 12. 24.

Ibid. vers. 28.

Euseb. Eccl. Hist. l. 7. cap. 13. & alibi.

tion, destroys Justice, or contradicts Reason, cannot come from Heaven; and ought not to be Believed.

In the next place; when once a Law is established as Divine, upon a sufficient Testimony of Miracles, no other Revelation that is contrary to it may be allowed, until it be repealed; and no repeal can be, but from the same Authority that enacted it: And therefore the repeal cannot be of force, till the Authority upon which it stands makes it self manifest by as great, if not greater, Miracles than were wrought at the Promulgation. In this Point was the Prophets Miscarriage, that went to cry against the Altar in *Bethel*, who suffered himself to be overcome by the pretence of the
1 King. 13. 18. old Prophet, contrary to his own Commission.

But without pursuing this farther at present, it is manifest, and by all Christians acknowledged as such, That the Gospel, which our Saviour and his Apostles published to the World, is neither contradictious to Reason, nor destructive of Vertue, or good Manners, or inconsistent with former Revelations; but that, on the contrary, it proposes the noblest End, *viz.* Eternal Life, and directs to the fittest and most agreeable Method for attaining it, and therefore must be accounted Divine.

This being granted, it follows, That no Doctrin, or Revelation, which is not reconcilable to this Gospel, can be from Heaven, or have Power to bind us. *If an Angel from Heaven preach any other Gospel, let him be accursed.* Gal. 1. 8.

My present Business being not with Heathens, but with Christians, I will take it for granted, till I see more occasion to prove it, That the Apostles and Evangelists, who were Divinely Inspired, committed to Writing that Gospel which they had received; that is, * as much of the Will of God, as might be necessary

* *Cum sit perfectus Scripturarum Canon, sibique ad omnia satis superque sufficiat, &c. Vinc. Lirin: Com. adv. Hær. cap. 2.*

sary for Men to Know and Believe, in order to their Salvation. † The late Representers of Popery seem to allow as much; when they own the Scripture to be the Word of God, of the greatest Authority upon Earth, and capable of leading a Man to all Truth.

† Papist Misrepr. and repr. cap. 13.

It must also be granted, That these Scriptures are no otherwise the Word of God, than they are rightly Understood and Interpreted. And here the Controversie begins, about the Sense of Scripture. For the Gentlemen of the Communion of the Church of *Rome* tell us, we must receive the Canon of the Scripture, and the Sense and Interpretation of Scripture, upon the Authority of the Church; for so the matter is stated even by their late Writers. And this being of great Importance, we will consider it Carefully, and proceed with as much Clearness, as may be a sufficient, though short, discussion of the Point.

Mons. de Meaux Expos. of the Doctr. of the Cath. Sect. 19.

If we are to receive the Canon and Sense of the Scripture upon the Churches Authority, then the Churches Authority is the Ground upon which the Canon and Sense of Scripture depends as to us; and if the Canon and Sense of Scripture depends as to us, upon the Church, then the Church has Authority to ingage and determine our Faith in these two Questions, 1. What Books are Canonical; and, 2. What the Sense of them must be. For if I know not the Sense of them, I know not the Will of God; without which it signifies nothing to have the Books, although they had been written with God's own Finger. And

If the Church has Authority to declare what Books, and what Sense of those Books, is Divine; then the Church has a Power to make me Believe its Declaration. I say, the Church must have a Power, if it has Authority, to make me Believe; because no Man can

Believe more than he can Believe, nor help Believing what for the time he does Believe.

If the Church has a Power to make me Believe, it either has it of it self, as it were by Nature, or it has it from God: But, of it self, the Church can have no such Power; because God only has a Dominion over the Minds of Men, and is therefore to be Believed by virtue of his own Authority.

If therefore the Church, as it consists of Men, who in their private Capacities, (that is, as they are Men may err) has no Authority of it self to determine my Faith; then the Authority of the Church, if it have any to make me Believe, must be Supernatural and Divine: Which, I think, is granted by the Author of the *Papist Misrepresented and represented*; when he says, he believes no Divine Faith ought to be given to any thing but what is of Divine Revelation.

Cap. 15. of Tradition.

'Tis then an established Point, That the Churches Authority is not to be believed as Natural, but as Supernatural and Divine; and if it be Supernatural, it cannot be proved out of Natural Principles. This the Papists seeing very well, lay down Infallibility for the Ground of the Churches Authority: So that the Churches Authority arising from its Infallibity, no Man can be bound, in matters of Faith, to submit to the one, farther than he can be Convinced of the other; and the Church can no longer have a Power over Mens Faith than she is Infallible.

The Infallibility then of the Church, being the Ground of her Authority, the Papists expect we should resolve our Faith into it; and we will consider how reasonable their expectations are in this Case.

But, first, let us remember, That all this Authority and Infallability is challenged for the present Church of this Age; or else there is no visible Infallible Judg, and

and so the matter comes to nothing: For if they were affixed to the Church of any one Age, then our Faith, when that Age is expired, must resolve it self some other way, as we shall see anon.

This hint being given, we proceed in search of this Infallibility; which is indeed a safe Basis to rest upon, whereever it is found. In the first place therefore, we must enquire what it is, or, what is to be understood by it.

Infallibility, properly taken, is the knowledge of all things. He that does not know every thing, may be mistaken in some thing; and he that may be mistaken in any thing, is not Infallible. To know all things, is to be Omniscient; and so God alone, who created every thing, by virtue of his own Infinity, is absolutely Infallible: But, for created Beings, their Knowledge is confined to such things as the wise Creator has placed within their Capacities, and so made knowable as it were by Nature. Therefore in other things which are Supernatural, and of which we can know no more than is revealed to us, Infallibility means a being preserved from all Errour and Mistake about them; and by Consequence must it self be a Supernatural and Divine quality, imparted according to the good Will and Pleasure of God.

And now our Business is come to this, to know first, Whether any body, or no, has this Infallibility. Secondly, if any body has it, where he, or they, are to be found? And thirdly, how others may be assured, that they, who pretend to have it, have it indeed.

First, Whether any body has this Infallibility. I take it for granted, upon the foregoing Proofs, that it is a Divine Supernatural Gift; and being such, that it must issue from the good Pleasure of God. Now any Gift whatsoever, which is Arbitrary, and Depen-

ding upon the Will of any one, cannot be pretended to in Reason, till he in whose Power it is, has made his Will known, that the Right and Possession of it pass over to him that Claims it. In like manner, no Divine Gift, which concerns more than them, who personally pretend to it, can have any weight or force without a Divine Testimony to ensure its own Credit.

Upon this Point the Papists argue, That Christ, who was not less able or faithfull than Moses in his house, would not leave his Church destitute of sufficient means for Peace and Unity 'tis granted; But then, say they, without an Infallible Guide (beside the Scripture) there can be neither reason for Faith, nor ground for Peace among Christians. A bold Assumption this! Nay farther, 'tis said, That Christ has promised to teach his Church all Truth, by special Assistance of the Holy Ghost, to the end of the World. This indeed is to the Purpose; but, that if any thing, it proves more than they wish: For it does as much prove all Christians to be Infallible as one, or more. For the Promise, being indefinite, cannot justly be appropriated to particulars; and, if it contains perpetual Infallibility, let them that can shew, from that Promise, that the Pastors have more right to it than the People.

Pap. Misrepr. and repr. cap. 16. pag. 19.

But suppose now there is Infallibility in the Church, let us see whereabouts it is Lodged, that we may have recourse to it, to end the Disputes, which have so long disturbed the Peace of Christendom. For if it cannot be found, we shall hardly be made to grant that there is any such thing; or, if it cannot be come at, we shall value it at the rate of all useless things.

De non apparentibus & non existentibus eadem est ratio.

I ask

I ask therefore, Where this Infallibility is, that has been so much talked of? Why, some have shewed their good will to fix it to the Popes of *Rome*: And one would at first think the Author, who represents a Papist, looked that way; when he told us, he did not doubt but God assists them (the Popes) with a particular helping Grace, such as was given to all the Prophets, when they were sent to Preach, that was Extraordinary. Such as was given to *Moses*, when he was made a God to *Pharaoh*, that was Miraculous. Sure he forgot the Lives of some Popes; or else, some late Pope has divided the Sea, or turned a River into Blood, and so filled him with Wonder, that he never thought to make any Reflexions. Lastly, with such Grace as was given to *Caiaphas*, when he prophesied that Jesus should dye for that Nation: A Truth which he utter'd without any good Design, as appears by his Sentence afterwards; and this instance indeed might well fit Pope *Greg.* 7. Yet, after all this, we are told that it is our Choice, Whether we will allow the Pope to be personally Infallible, or no: And if they do not see reason enough to believe it, I am sure I do not; and so the Pope's Claim must be dismissed as indefensible.

Cap. 18. p. 21.

Pap. Misrepr. and repr. cap. 18. pag. 22.

But is a Council without him then Infallible? If it be, what becomes of the Pope's Supremacy? For whereever Infallibility goes, the Supremacy, touching matters of Faith, must go with it. And they cannot be separated, since, as we shewed above, the one has its whole dependance upon the other.

This difficulty has been apprehended; and so, to secure the Pope's Supremacy, a Council without him has been judged not Infallible: And where any Council has wanted the Pope's Confirmation, as we see for matter of fact, it has been thought to want Authority to.

Vide Not. Bever. in Conc. Nicen. secund. Chron. Urspar. An. Dom. 793.

Though

Though for all this, the Point of Supremacy, of how great importance soever, is not well agreed among them; for Councils have taken upon them to depose the Pope, and the French Roman Catholick Divines allow them in it.

Vide quid Chron. Ursper. ex Brunone Card. de Greg. 7. ad An. Dom. 1080.

The only expedient in this Case is, what some lay down, That a Council assembled by and under the Pope, whose Authority must confirm their Decrees, is Infallible.

Being come to this, as the last effort, we will proceed with a regard due to a Tenet of such moment.

And here I ask again, Whether every Bishop and Devine, that Debates and Votes in Council, be Infallible? No; this must not be said, because there have beeen great Differences among the Divines, and contrary Opinions much urged: Besides, it would make every Bishop as absolute as the Pope, to make him Infallible, which would quite undo the pretences of the Church of *Rome*. But then, if every Bishop in Council be not Infallible, for ought I can see, this Infallibility must be given to the Pope. And if his approbation be indeed necessary to Authorize their Decrees, he has e'en most right to it. For if the Authenticknes of the Decrees depends upon the Pope, 'tis plain, he must have a Negative vote to the Council; and, if he has a Negative vote to the Council, either he must have this Infallibility, or there can be none at all of any use. But as to the Pope's being Infallible, we were told before, it is no Article of Faith; and so we are at Liberty from them to believe it, or let it alone. Though, to say the Truth, if I had been told the contrary, the Errors which some Popes have fallen into, would have hindred me, in despite of any good will, from owning him so.

Is this Infallibility ſhared among them, ſo that every one has ſome? For Infallibility they muſt have, or their Authority is loſt: No, this cannot be neither; for Infallibility is a Quality that cannot be divided, or enjoyed to the halfs. And if it could, it would not do the buſineſs; for then they would be Fallible in part, as well as Infallible in part. And ſo we ſhould be as hard put to it, to find which part their Infallibility reaches to, as we are to find that they have any at all.

Here peradventure, it may be thought, becauſe it has been ſaid heretofore, That though the Pope and his Council may be Fallible, in their Arguments and Diſcourſes, yet, in the Reſult of them, *viz.* their Definitions which only concern the Church, they are Infallible. This indeed is to the purpoſe, if it could be as eaſily proved as ſaid. But ſince neither Art nor Nature does allow an Infallible Concluſion to iſſue from Fallible Means, it muſt be wholly Supernatural and Divine. And ſo we are come, in the third place, to ask, How they came by a Power to make the Concluſion Divine, the Means being Humane? or, How they will make it appear to me, or any Man elſe, that they are endued with ſuch a Power?

Certainly a Claim ſo bold as this, ought to be very well made out. But here, alaſs! we are turn'd over to Motives of Credibility, which are ſometimes called the marks of the Church; however, we will ſee what can be made of them.

By Motives of Credibility, muſt be meant, ſuch as may work upon my Reaſon, and ſo incline my Mind to believe, or aſſent to any thing for a Truth; and ſo I can be induced to believe no farther than the point is made Credible to me. Well; but whatever is Supernatural can never work upon my Reaſon, as being quite

quite above it, without some Divine Evidence and Testimony; and that must either be Miracles, or Scripture. For Miracles, they have of late been little pretended to: But from Scripture, they tell us, Christ has promised to his Church a perpetual Assistance of his Grace; yea, such a measure of the Spirit, as made *Caiaphas* prophesy Truth, almost whether he would or no. But how can they pretend Scripture in this Case? who have told us, we must receive the Sense and Interpretation of Scripture from the Infallible Authority of the Church: And that not in a few Points, but in every Doubt; and never presume upon our own private Sentiments, howsoever seemingly grounded on Reason and Scripture. If we must thus absolutely depend upon the Authority of the Church for the Interpretation of Scripture, then the Authority of the Church must be better known to us than the Sense of the Scripture: And if it be better known, it cannot be proved by Scripture; for every thing that proves another must it self be more evident. And if the Churches Authority cannot be proved by Scripture, it can never be proved without Miracles; and by consequence can never be believed. But if Christians must read and judg of Scripture, and believe it in this Point, I can see no reason why they may not in every one else that concerns Religion; since there are few Points in it that are not much more cleary expressed.

Pap. Misrepr. and repr. cap. 14. pag. 15.

Here Traditions would put in to help out. But, to spoil all we are told, we must receive them too upon the Authority of the Church; for it would be as dangerous to trust the World with a liberty of judging Traditions, as of judging Scripture, and more contests there are and would be about them. And yet, which is an insuperable Difficulty, Tradition is silent in many Points of the Romish Faith; nay, in all, whereabout any

any Difference is, I mean, as to the Primitive Church; and sure Tradition cannot be produced where there is none. If Tradition could be produced, still the Difficulty returns: That Tradition would be more manifest, and therefore above the Churches Authority. And how acceptable a Point that is at *Rome*, Mr. *White* and Mr. *Serjeant* could have told at their own Cost. *Vide Histor. Hæres. Blacio.*

But though Scripture and Tradition are insufficient, perhaps Succession may make out this Matter; or else, why are we so often told of it? and truly, I must needs say, I do not know why we are. For, if they mean a Succession of Bishops, that can prove nothing to *Rome*, because it is common to other Churches, who have as undoubted a Succession as they. If they mean a Succession of Doctrin, from the Apostles to us, 'tis what we allow; and, for want of it, refuse those other Doctrins they would impose.

There is behind a very forcible Argument, to prove, That the Pope and his Council together are not Infallible, or, that the Papists themselves do not think them so. I Instance, in the *Lateran* Council, under Pope *Innocent* the III. where it was decreed, that Princes may be Deposed. He that Represents a Papist, answers, That this is no Article of Faith, and that they are not bound to believe it. But if this be not to be believed, it is because the Truth of it is not evident enough; and if it be not evident enough, it must be because the Churches proposing or decreeing is not sufficient to make it evident, which is the Point I aim at. Pap. Misrepr. and repr. cap. 20.

If he will, as some have, acknowledge the deposing Doctrin to be true; let the World consider what kind of Subjects those must be that are in such a Communion; and if he disavows it, he makes it appear that he does not think their Church Infallible. Nor

can I think that Church has sufficiently cleared it self from the Charge of this Doctrin, which some of them call a Calumny, till it be as Publickly and Authoritatively Repealed, as it was Decreed. Nor can I imagine, how that Author could tell us, in the fourteenth Chapter of his Book, that he thought himself obliged not to rely on his own private Judgment, but upon the Authority of the Church, in any Doubt; and yet, in the twentieth Chapter of the same Book, tells us, in Consequence, what the Church has peremptorily Decreed, is not to be believed. I am sorry, when that Decree passed, such a powerfull Measure of the Spirit, which made *Caiaphas* Prophesie, was absent. And since it was so then, I do not see how they can reasonably presume he was not absent in other Points too. Damnation being so particularly denounced against Rebellion, we cannot think that a Point so inconsiderable as to be passed by in advertency.

It now plainly appears, that this Challenge of Infallibility is very unaccountable; and, to shew its absurdity yet more, you shall see, that though we should grant (as we do not) that they have Infallibility some where, yet, in the resolution of Faith, it would be useless.

The Church at this day is vexed and divided by many Heresies, and contrary Opinions. How must the Truth be cleared, and Peace be restored to Christendom? By the Churches Authority, say the Papists. But it has been proved that the Churches Authority extends no farther than she has Infallibility; and the Pope being not Infallible alone, and their being no Council assembled under him, the present Church has no Infallibility, and so, by Consequence, no Authority to determine Controversies about Faith.

Per-

Peradventure it will be said, the Council which sat in the last Age defined all Points, and so determined our Faith. I answer, That what that Council defined is one thing; and its setling Faith, and determining Controversies, appears by the effect to be another. It will be said, it determined all but what Pride and Obstinacy still kept on foot. But if Controversies still remain, whether from Pride or Heretical-pravity, or from any other Cause whatever, it matters not: Why should the Scripture be taxed as insufficient to be a Rule of Faith, for not effecting what their Infallibility cannot bring to pass? Sure, there is no reason why it should.

Well, but for obstinate and prejudiced Persons, we will set them aside; and see what can be done for inquisitive People, such as are willing to be Convinced; what shall these do?

They tell us, They must be guided by the Definitions and Decrees of the last General Council assembled at *Trent*. But how shall they be ascertained that they have a true Copy of the Acts of that Council? For upon occasion Suppositious Canons have been alledged by the Church of *Rome*. The Authority of the present Church cannot do it, as you may conclude from that which has already been said; besides, it is the thing in Question. However, suppose from the Testimony of the present Church witnessing, though not authorising, and by such Methods as we receive the Works of other Writers, we should admit the Acts of the Council of *Trent* to be truly derived to us; What shall we do to attain the true Sense and Meaning of them, without which they can signifie nothing?

And to shew you that this is no Captious Question, some great Men among them have interpreted that Councils Decrees very differently. And the late Re-

presentet of a Papist has construed them in a Sense very wide, from what some eminent Doctors long since gave of them. Are we not now in a fair way for Peace and Unity? After all, if so many Difficulties surround the Learned, what shall Women do, and such as only understand their Mother Tongue?

I can meet with no Answer to this, but that the Learned must with honest Minds, and just Diligence, search out the Sense of the Churches Definitions; and from them, must those of less Judgment and meaner Capacities, receive it.

But if the matter must rest here, for my Life, I cannot see why the like Care and Pains should not bring a Man to the true Sense of the Scripture, as well as of a Council. 'Twould be an ill Reflection upon God's Wisdom to say, he ordered his Will to be written, but not so intelligible as human Writings. And if there be some, who for want of Ability in themselves, must rest their Faith upon other Mens Judgments, I do not see why the Clergy of the Church of *England* may not as well be relied on, as the Priests of the Church of *Rome*; since the World has no reason to think them less Learned, or less Sincere.

The Church of *England*, among all impartial Men, has this manifest advantage, that She derives Her Faith from Scripture; not fancifully Interpreted, but Expounded to a Sense which the Text reasonably leads to. And to strengthen Her Exposition, She takes in the Testimony of the Church in Her four first General Councils: Not that She rests upon an Authority in them, but She takes them as Witnesses to shew, that in Her Interpretation, She is neither Singular nor Private.

Thus, in short, a Member of the Church of *England* proceeds. He is certain his Faith is right and true,

true, becauſe it is founded, as to its Object, upon the Will of God. He is certain it ſtands upon the Will of God, becauſe it ſtands upon the Word of God. He is certain it is built upon the Word of God, becauſe it is built upon the Scripture. He is certain the Scripture is the Word of God, becauſe the Prophets, Evangeliſts and Apoſtles, that wrote it, were Divinely Inſpired. And he is made certain that they were Divinely Inſpired, by the Divine Teſtimony of Miracles which God gave them. Nor, laſtly, can he doubt, but whatſoever God ſets his Seal to, is Truth; for he will not, he cannot Lye or Deceive.

If he be asked, how he knows theſe Books to be Written by thoſe Inſpired Men, to whom they are attributed? He Anſwers, for that, he has an univerſal Teſtimony of Friends and Enemies through all Ages: Which is as good an Evidence as a Matter of Fact can bear, or does require; and, when he reads them, he is farther Confirm'd, by finding them ſo admirably Compiled and Suited to that Character.

If he be asked, how he attains the right Senſe of them? He anſwers, by uſing due Attention, and an unprejudiced Mind, with ſuch other helps as are fit for that Purpoſe; he gains as great Certainty of the true meaning of Scripture, as Senſe and Reaſon can bear in an ordinary Capacity, (I mean, as far as concerns the Articles of Faith ſumm'd into his Creed;) and is as ſafe, in this Reſolution, as was the Primitive Church, with which he agrees. More than this, he does not apprehend neceſſary.

Duplici modo munire fidem noſtram debemus Primo ſcil. divinæ Legis Authoritate tum deinde Eccleſ. Catholicæ Traditione. Vinc. Lirin. Com. adv. Hær. Cap. 1.

After this, ſince the Papiſts have taxed our Faith as wavering and uncertain, how unjuſtly, you may eaſily diſcern, I might here make them a Requital; by telling the World, that upon their own Principles, they can have no Faith at all.

For

For if what Faith they have arises from the Churches Authority, then, if the Church has no Authority, they can have no Faith. But, I have proved before, the Church can have no such Authority, because it has not Infallibility; and it cannot reasonably pretend to Infallibility, because it can make no Evidence of it, and without Evidence no Man can believe.

But God forbid I should say, or think, they have no Faith: I only offered this, to shew the weakness and insufficiency of the Principles they go upon, and what little Reason they have to charge us.

And now to that Question so often asked, By what Authority we depart from the Faith of the Church of *Rome*? I answer, by an Authority which is inseparable from the Mind of every Man, to refuse to believe any thing for which he has not a Reason to him sufficient; indeed, no Man can believe without it. For the Mind of Man is so disposed, as to Truth, that it immediately imbraces it, and closes with it as soon as ever it discerns it: But if the Mind discerns no Truth in a Proposition, it cannot assent to it, whatever Profession the Man makes.

The Church of *Rome* has not sufficiently proved the Doctrins in dispute betwixt us; and that, if we had no more, would be Authority enough for us to refuse them, and depart from her; since She will not receive us to Communion, but upon Conditions which they cannot make out to be reasonable, unless we grant that false Supposition of Infallible Authority.

They ask farther, who is to be Judg of the Controversies and Reasonings between us? I answer, every Man must for himself: For as every Man must believe, so every Man must have a Reason why he believes; and sure every one must be a Judg of his own Reason whether he be Convinced or no.

We

We are told, That then there will be Heresies and Schisms; it is true there are so, and, for ought I see, will be so still: But that's no more than the Apostle told the *Corinthians* must be, *that those which are approved may be made manifest.* 1 Cor. 11. 19.

The Church of *Rome* may appear yet more unequal in Her Pretences; for that She advances a Doctrin which cannot be believed, even by those who pay the utmost deference to her Authority, and that is Transubstantiation, which implies several Contradictions. Some, that own the Churches Infallible Authority, and are resolved to rest upon it, may so overrule their Minds as to keep them from considering or thinking upon that Doctrin, and so for the time do not as it were disbelieve it; but, whenever they come to weigh it, their Minds cannot imbrace it, because there can be no Reason for a Contradiction: For sure Church Authority cannot go on where the Power of God ceases. If it be said, it is only a Contradiction in appearance, that comes to the same thing; for 'till it can be made not to seem a Contradiction; it must have the same effect upon all Mens Minds, as upon ours, who know it to be really a gross one. And this makes me sensible, That it is a greater absurdity to believe, as they say, implicitly or indefinitly as the Church believes, when a Man considers not what that is, than to Pray implicitly, or in a general intention with the Church, when one knows not what the Church Prays for. It being absurd to say, a Man believes any thing which the Mind does not particularly imbrace, or apply it self to; and the Mind cannot be said to imbrace that which it thinks or knows nothing of.

Here it must not be forgotten, that I am not speaking of the Habit, but the Acts of Faith. Nor do the Principles I have laid down oblige me to think, every one

one has alwas a true ground for his Faith. I doubt not, but many believe upon inducements, that would, if examined, be found Slender and Disproportionate: for such it is their good fortune if they believe aright, but if they are in the wrong, they must answer for not taking greater Care. But if they have used their utmost Care and Diligence, and yet continue in the wrong, we may leave them without any desperate apprehension to the mercy of God.

Most of the Points about which we differ with *Rome* have been discussed in particular Treatises, and so I will meddle little with them, having from the first designed in chief to consider the grounds of Faith.

I would here have taken leave, but that I am stayed with a Pretence, That the Faith which we own, we had from the Church of *Rome*. * I will not here inquire into the merits of this Pretence, but examin what use they make of it. Suppose now we had the Scripture, and the Creeds from them, what follows? Why, then they would have us receive all the rest of their Additional Articles too. Indeed, if we had received all we believe upon their Churches Authority it had been a better inference. But they know, we did not receive any Articles upon any Authority but the Reason of them; and therefore where that ends our Faith stops, and we receive no more.

* They that desire an account of our Church primitively, let them read the Learned *Origines Britanicæ*.

They would it seems prescribe; and, supposing we imbrace some Truths which they pretend to have delivered to us, would have us entertain whatever else they offer. This is very strange indeed!

If any one hearing the Devils declaring Jesus Christ to be the Son of God, as the Gospel tells us they did, should have believed him so; and † *Tertullian* we know made it a great Argument, and appealed to the Heathens upon it, when the Devils made Confession; must they

† *Edatur hic aliquis sub Tribunalibus vestris, quem Dæmone agi constet, jussu à quolibet Christiano loqui Spiritus ille impurus, tam se Dæmonem confitebitur de vero quam alibi Deum de falso. Apolog. Cap. 23.*

they therefore have believed all the Devils ſaid at any time, becauſe they ſaw reaſon to believe what they ſaid ſome times : 'Twould have been a ſtrange Caſe with Religion, unleſs Men had been aſſured the Devil's inclinations to deceive ſhould have always been overruled; and they, like *Caiaphas*, ſhould have been made to ſpeak Truth whether they would or no. In like manner, to have received ſome Truths from the Church of *Rome*, can be no reaſon why we ſhould believe others.

Thus far I have conſidered the Grounds of Faith, and ſhewed the Weakneſs and Inſufficiency of thoſe Means which the Church of *Rome* takes to reſolve it by. I pray God, by his Grace, ſo to inlighten the Underſtandings, and diſpoſe the Wills of all Chriſtians, that they may heartily endeavor the Peace and Unity of the Church, by an humble and impartial Enquiry after Truth, the only Way effectually to bring it about.

Popery has of late been Expounded to a more favourable Senſe, and Repreſented in a leſs formidable Dreſs, than it wore heretofore : And ſo far am I from being angry at it, that I am heartily glad; hoping it may tend to the Scattering thoſe thick Miſts of Prejudice and Ignorance that have obſcured the Truth, and hindred many from diſcerning it. I only wiſh they would manifeſt the Sincerity of their Repreſentation by a Practice anſwerable to it. They took away the Scriptures from ſome, leaſt in reading they ſhould miſinterpret it : And I wiſh they would take away Images, which have been horribly miſunderſtood; ſince they now tell the World they think them but as Books to inſtruct the Ignorant, and honorary Remembrances to the Learned. This would be one reaſonable and fair Step toward reſtoring Peace, and healing the Schiſm. And ſince we are told, that no Power

upon Earth can limit, alter, or annul, any Precept of Divine Institution, contrary to the Intention of the Law-giver, (a Position highly reasonable) we expect the Cup should be given to all of the Communion ; seeing that our Saviour instituted and gave that as well as the Bread. And after his Institution, the same Night that he was betrayed, I cannot find that he made the least Alteration. To say our Saviour had no Mind that should be done which he appointed, would be very absurd : Therefore what he once instituted, must continue in force as his Mind still, unless they can shew that he altered it ; and this would be another good Step toward our Union. They have now reduced their praying to Saints departed, to a desire only that the Blessed would assist them with their Prayers to God, as we desire good Men on Earth to pray for us ; but this not implying any Necessity of praying to them, though for no more than to pray for us, 'tis great pity they will not lay down a Practice to which our Apprehensions will never suffer us to be Reconciled. One would think they that aggravate the Sin of Schism so much, should remove all Obstacles that may be a hindrance of Union : The Order and Decency of God's Service would be no way disturbed by such abatements. And let them look to it, that divide the Church upon Points by their own confession not necessary ; and no otherways to be accounted for, but upon the pretended Authority of the Church. But this is to enter into particulars, which I resolved to decline, having undertaken only to examin that Pretence : And so I will wind up all in a short Advertisement, That when I dispute against the Authority of the Church, I do not mean that Power which every Church, as an Incorporate Society, must have to cast out of her Communion

munion ſuch as walk Diſorderly ; nor that Power therefore which every Church muſt have over Her Members to eſtabliſh Rules for Decency and Order, in the Circumſtantials, the Ceremonies of Religion: But, I mean, that Authority which the Church of *Rome* pretends to have over our Conſciences and Faith ; in which Caſe we own no Maſter but one in Heaven.

Cui Tri-uni-Deo ſit honor, laus & gloria, in ſecula ſeculorum. Amen.

FINIS.

ADVERTISEMENT.

BEcauſe the Author could not attend the Preſs, to correct the Errors of it, he prays the Reader to excuſe the Faults he may find that are Literal, and ſuch as are in the Pointing ; and read Page 4. Line 25. inſtances, p. 12. l. *ult.* but at the rate of, p. 13. l. 20. it is in our Choice, p. 19. l. 20. Suppoſititious.